



COLUMN BY SECRETARY BEN BRANCEL: State Budget Supports Growing Agriculture Industry

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MADISON – Wisconsin’s agricultural industry continues to grow from our farmers markets to the international ports. When Governor Scott Walker signed the 2013-2015 budget he ensured that the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) would be able to maintain its core missions and work for the prosperity of Wisconsin’s consumers, farmers and agribusinesses.

This budget will allow our food safety inspectors and partners to inspect more than 20,000 food-related businesses to ensure safe and wholesome food. Our staff will be able to continue to protect animal and plant health through routine inspections and respond to emergency situations. We will be able to meet our environmental obligations to safeguard our environment and protect consumers from fraudulent business practices.

Early last year, the Governor announced the Dairy 30x20 Initiative. This initiative was formed after numerous discussions with industry stakeholders on how best to support dairy farmers to be profitable and maintain our place as America’s Dairyland. In this budget, the Governor maintained funding for farmer grants and added funding for processor grants. Now, we will collaborate with industry stakeholders again to best decide how these valuable dollars will make the biggest impact on processor investment. By producing and processing 30 billion pounds of milk by 2020, Wisconsin will be able to create additional jobs and grow our state’s economy.

The best way for any of our agribusinesses to be successful is to understand the regulatory perimeters to work and build. This budget clarifies the way challenges will be handled with high capacity wells. Farms and plants will be able to work with the Department of Natural Resources to safely install pumping systems that will be good for our environment and make business growth possible.

The budget signing confirms the movement of the Tank and Petroleum Testing Program from the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) to DATCP. This move will increase efficiencies by improving our state’s overall performance when it comes to inspecting our fueling stations. Inspectors from DSPS and DATCP will be cross-trained so one inspector can look at the quality of the fuel stored in Wisconsin tanks and measure the pump for accuracy. Previously, one inspector from DSPS would look at quality while one DATCP inspector would travel to the retail stop separately to check for accuracy.

Whether it’s doing business or paying taxes, people want to know how and where their money is being spent. One thing this budget does is protect the integrity of our segregated funds making sure money paid into those funds is used the way they were intended. In this budget, monies have been realigned allowing the Agrichemical Management fund and the Agricultural Chemical Cleanup fund to be better used as originally planned. We’re moving in the right direction so when farmers pay a fee or businesses pay a fee, they are used for the specified purpose.

This budget makes a commitment to Wisconsin’s rural communities from education to workforce development to infrastructure. By making investments in the Department of Transportation, we will be able to move our agricultural products from our farms to the marketplace. The budget will support small businesses by offering tax relief. By investing additional money in rural medical education programs, there will be additional access to healthcare in rural areas.

At DATCP, this budget provides the framework for our staff to better serve Wisconsin agriculture and sets the state up for future success. Through our reforms, Wisconsinites will be able to move forward, building on opportunities that will lead to prosperity and true independence.

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